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North Texas Daily

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News

On Sept. 10, during the university's last Faculty Senate meeting, faculty members were informed they would not be receiving raises due to budget concerns. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Faculty 'frustrated' after years of low pay increases

By Hannah Everett
Managing Editor

Heading into a new fiscal year, faculty and staff at the university say they are frustrated with the lack of salary increases this year and in previous years. Adding to the frustration, they said, is the growing gap between faculty and administrative wages.

Faculty members who spoke with the *North Texas Daily* said the issue is not new, but rather a request they have been delivering to administration for years. Since 2019, administrators have received an approximately 23 to 25 percent salary increase.

All faculty members interviewed by the *Daily* requested to remain anonymous due to fear of retribution.

"The problem is not that they cannot give raises this year," a faculty member said. "The problem is, all the other years where they had not as many budgetary problems and they didn't give raises. And the problem is the lack of transparency about it and the lack of planning. Again, this feeling the faculty has [is] that we are not a budget priority."

According to a Denton Independent School District salary plan, the starting annual salary for first-year teachers with no experience is $59,000. The university employs 100 faculty members with yearly salaries lower than DISD's starting rate, according to university faculty salary data. The spreadsheet does not specify whether faculty are full-time, but lists job titles and payroll status.

University President Harrison Keller has a salary of $800,000 per year, a 16.47 percent increase from former university President Neal Smatresk's salary of $686,880 during his 10th year as president in 2024.

During the last Faculty Senate meeting on Sept. 10, faculty members were informed they would not be receiving raises due to the university's current budgetary concerns.

"You realize that if you were somewhere else, you would make more money," a faculty member said. "And so it becomes demoralizing."

The university began FY25 on Sept. 1, 2024, with a $27 million deficit due to decreases in state funding, increased operational costs and a decline in graduate student enrollment. Keller said during the Aug. 14 Board of Regents meeting that the deficit has been eliminated through a strategic budgeting plan.

"This year, for fiscal year 2026, UNT again increased minimum wage for existing UNT staff to $15 an hour," said Clayton Gibson, vice president of finance and administration, in an email to the *Daily*.

Gibson said, "there are no raises budgeted for 2026" for other positions.

Merit raises, which are increases in salary based on performance, were not awarded to faculty in FY25. Instead, faculty employed before Aug. 1, 2022, received a $500 raise, which was then spread out over nine months. The raise rate was the same for all faculty. Multiple faculty members described the $500 raise as a "slap in the face."

FACULTY continues on page 2

What's Inside:

Arts & Life pg.4
University Comedy Club undertakes unscripted adventures with long-form improv premiere

The Dose pg.6
A recession indicator, Frost Children craft a nearly perfect pop album.

Opinion pg.8
Celebrating Hispanic heritage should also include resistance

Sports

Mean Green swim and dive aim to follow up last season's success

The Mean Green swim team will kick off their season at the Sam Freas Invite in Edmond, Oklahoma on Sept. 27. **Photo by Tyler Quisenberry**

By Carson Kelly
Staff Writer

In a 2024 season marked by three diving conference championships and six program records, the Mean Green swim and dive teams achieved their best season at the American Conference Championships last year.

Entering this season, the team aims to maintain the same level of performance as last year. For athletes like junior diver Sydney Guidara, the expectation remains the same: to win.

"Pressure is a privilege," Guidara said. "To have that pressure on us is what motivates us. It's what gets us up in the morning."

Last season, the team was built on the backs of numerous university alumni, including Shaena McCloud, Kailey Turner and Indra Vandenbussche, all of whom finished with medals at the American Conference Championships.

The then-seniors also made an impact during the regular season. Head coach Brittany Roth said the team's veterans instilled an underdog mindset into the program throughout the year, as they faced multiple Power Four conference opponents.

"They had this mindset of 'Why can't we win today?'" Roth said. "Even though some people said we can't or we won't [win], they're going to prove them wrong and they did over and over and over again."

This past offseason saw the graduation of several of those seniors from the program. The swimming program lost a vast majority of its athletes, with 11 of the 12 total seniors graduating.

SWIM continues on page 7

Arts & Life

'Feel the legacy, live the blues,' Denton Blues Festival celebrates 27 years

By Sophia Carbajal
Senior Arts & Life Writer

Over 100 people sat in lawn chairs and atop picnic blankets under the shade of the trees in Quakertown Park for the Denton Blues Festival on Sept. 19-21.

The sound of spunky bass guitars and rolling cymbals vibrated off the stage. Suddenly, a booming voice erupted from behind the crowd. Thirty-nine-year-old lead singer C.T. Davis – called the "Human Microphone" of his group, the C.T. Davis Powerhouse Blues Band – sang without a mic and strolled toward the stage.

"One of my favorite things as an entertainer is I believe in singing to people, not at people," Davis said. "I like to grab the crowd and put them in the palm of my hand, so wherever I go, they follow. I like for the crowd to feel part of the show."

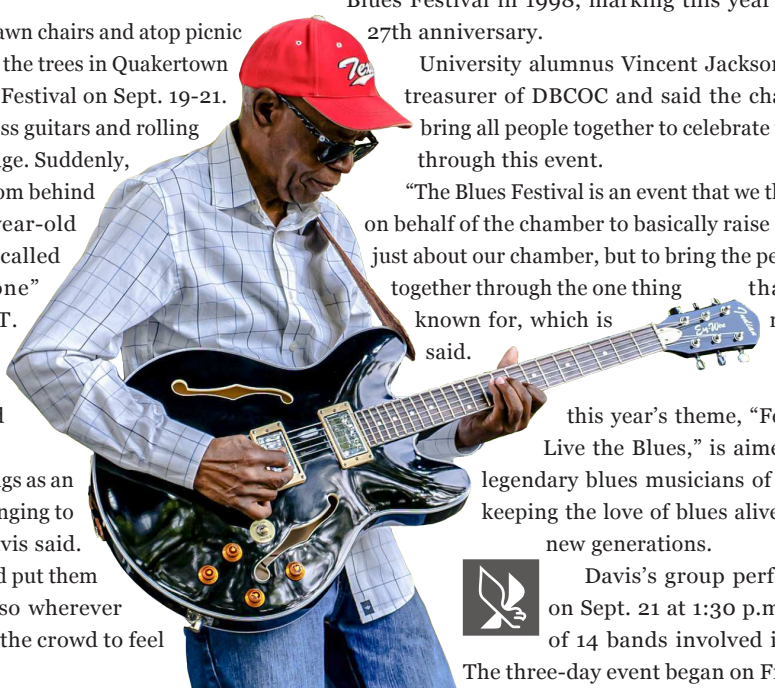

Photo by Trennt Rhea

The music genre of blues emerged from African American culture during the 1860s and gained popularity in mainstream media with the blues revival of the 1960s and 70s.

The Denton Blues Festival was organized by the Denton Black Chamber of Commerce, a group established in 1995 to expand and promote African American-owned businesses in the Denton area. The chamber began the Denton Blues Festival in 1998, marking this year as the event's 27th anniversary.

University alumnus Vincent Jackson serves as the treasurer of DBCOC and said the chamber aims to bring all people together to celebrate the community through this event.

"The Blues Festival is an event that we throw every year on behalf of the chamber to basically raise awareness, not just about our chamber, but to bring the people of Denton together through the one thing that Denton is known for, which is music," Jackson said.

Jackson said this year's theme, "Feel the Legacy, Live the Blues," is aimed at honoring legendary blues musicians of the past while keeping the love of blues alive and inspiring new generations.

Davis's group performed second on Sept. 21 at 1:30 p.m. and was one of 14 bands involved in the festival. The three-day event began on Friday, Sept. 19, with a community karaoke battle from 6 to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday consisted of full days of performances from award-winning musicians and a vendor market.

BLUES continues on page 4

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Pattern of large administrative pay increases and low faculty raises impacts faculty morale

FACULTY continued from page 1

A faculty member said last year's raise felt like an empty gesture.

"To be honest, when I heard about it, I really felt it was a little bit of an insult," a faculty member said. "You know, some people will say 'well, it's 500, it's better than nothing.' Okay, but my point is, is it done so that they can say, well, we gave you this? Is it done to make people shut up? Is it done to placate?"

> *"You realize that if you were somewhere else, you would make more money," a faculty member said. "And so it becomes demoralizing."*

Faculty members said they have been pushing for larger raises in recent years due to the rising cost of living.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, inflation rose to 2.9 percent in August.

"I still have to find secondary work," a faculty member said. "I enjoy what I do. I love teaching. I find myself doing more things to find ways to make more money because of [the] cost of living."

Texas university presidents of colleges with enrollments similar to the university have salaries lower than Keller's. University of Texas at Arlington President Jennifer Cowley and Texas Tech University President Lawrence Schovance have smaller salaries than Keller and more years of experience.

Michael McPherson, university provost and vice president for academic affairs, received a 4.13 percent raise in FY25, increasing his previous $394,394 annual salary in 2024 to $410,734 in 2025.

Among the high raise percentages in the last seven years is Gibson's, with a 30.51 percent raise, which translates to $95,000 in FY23.

Last year, administrative pay accounted for $22,799,462 of the university budget, supporting 113 administrative positions.

In FY25, five out of 113 administrators made less than a six-figure salary, meaning 95.5 percent of administrators have a six-figure salary. In terms of faculty, 488 out of 1,395 members earn a six-figure salary. This represents 34.98 percent of faculty members, with 64.23 percent of faculty earning a salary below $100,000.

According to the university's faculty compensation guidelines, the university offers a 9-month minimum salary rate of $60,000 for tenure and tenure-track faculty. The minimum 9-month rate for professional faculty is $43,500.

The 2025 average full-time faculty salary rate for Texas, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, is $154,470 for professors, $105,860 for associate professors, $95,041 for assistant professors and $61,957 for instructors.

"It's administrative bloat," a faculty member said. "The idea of 'you're all valuing what you do more than what we do,' just by that fact. There's a $300,000 difference between what our past president was paid to our new president, which I get it, it's a huge job. [...] Is that necessary to give a position that much of a raise?"

Faculty and staff at the university said they have struggled to obtain answers from the administration regarding what they perceive as a lack of transparency in the budgeting and salary increase processes.

"I think also, for me, particularly, what frustrates me is, again, it's never knowing," a faculty member said. "And it's this, well, 'maybe next year,' and then the next year arrives and it's 'well, no, we can't do it. But, you know, maybe next year, right?' So, it's disingenuous and it's demoralizing."

While faculty members expressed dissatisfaction with the university and their pay, some noted that their passion for teaching gives them reason to continue at the university.

"I love teaching," a faculty member said. "I love the contact with students. [...] I love coming up with new material. I like seeing that the students are getting maybe a little bit of information that will help them later on in life."

Keller sent an email with an official notice to faculty on Aug. 15, along with an unlisted six-minute YouTube video explaining the budget.

In the video, Keller states that the university will mitigate the negative impacts on the budget by increasing enrollment and revenue. Keller said in the video that a "central part of this work" is improving student retention and success.

"So while we'll pull back spending in certain areas for this next year and over the next five years, we'll also make target investments in student success, teaching excellence, research, athletics, university advancement and competitive salaries," Keller said in the video.

Keller was asked about faculty salaries during a meeting of the Faculty Senate on May 14. Keller said the university needs to have competitive salaries.

> *"I still have to find secondary work," a faculty member said. "[...] I love teaching. I find myself doing more things to find ways to make more money because of cost of living."*

"Invariably, though I find no matter how much people love the university, they love their families more," Keller said in the meeting. "[...] If we're going to be competitive as a university, we've got to commit to having more competitive faculty and staff salaries."

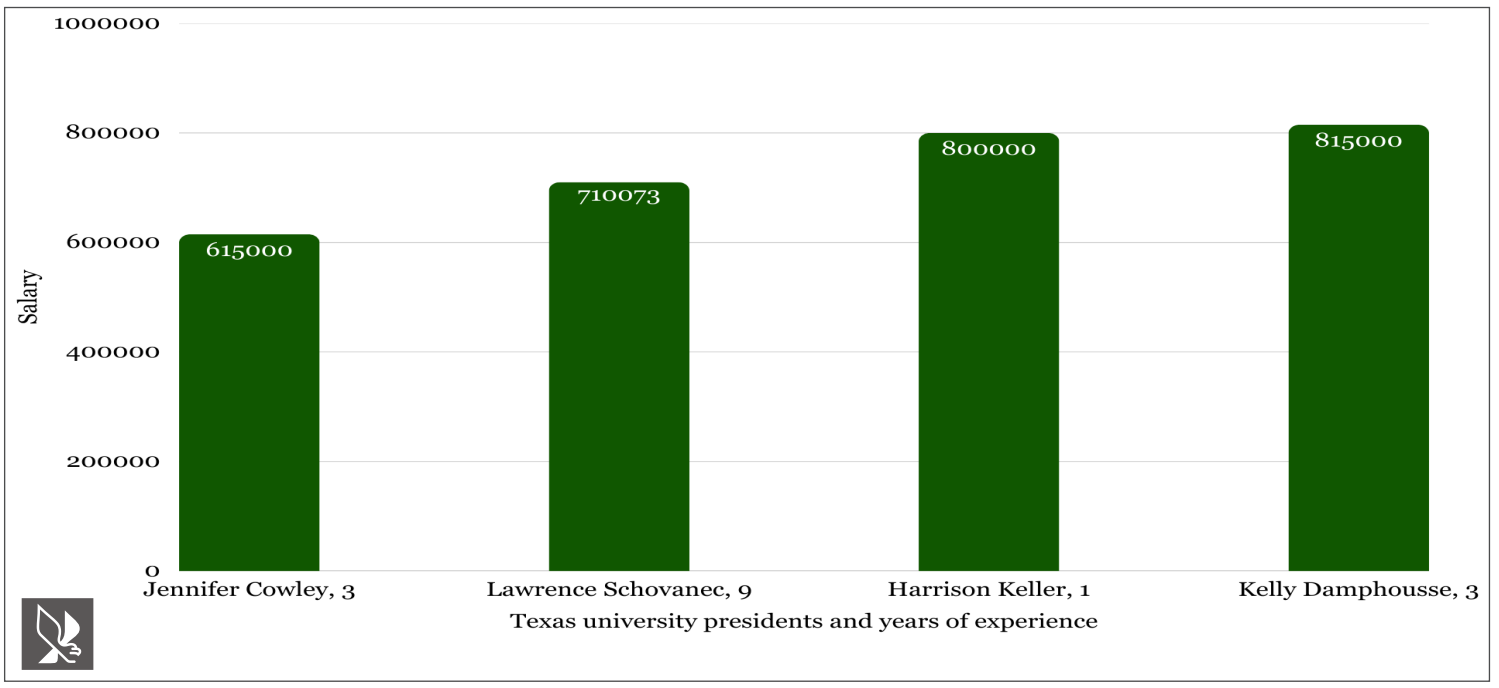
During the meeting, Keller stated that departments will begin budgeting a merit pool into their structural budgets each year for faculty raises, starting in FY27 on Sept. 1, 2026.

Coby Condrey, Faculty Senate chair and associate librarian, informed faculty members at the meeting that Keller had discussed faculty pay and departmental merit pools during an executive committee meeting.

"The president was like 'I need you to stick with us here for one more year, and then, after that, departments will be expected to operationalize merit pools automatically in your budgeting process," Condrey said during the meeting.

The *Daily* scheduled an interview on Sept. 17 with Keller regarding the university budget, recent financial concerns, budget cuts and faculty salary data. Keller cancelled the interview and provided a statement to the *Daily* through email. Keller offered to find a time after Sept. 26 to reschedule the interview.

"The Fiscal Year 2026 budget is leaner than in recent years due to several factors, including decreases in state funding, increased operational costs for items such as insurance, and lower graduate student enrollment," Keller said in an email to the *Daily*. "Our overall state formula funding allocation is down $32 million for the biennium, primarily due to declines in our graduate student enrollment last year during the 'base year' for formula funding calculations."



Graphic by Hannah Everett

State representatives urged university to take action while honoring Mary-Catherine Hallmark

By Diego Hernandez
Deputy News Editor

State Rep. Andy Hopper and Rep. Shelly Luther criticized the university at the Denton Downtown Square on Sept. 23, saying the school failed to adequately address the classroom incident on Sept. 10 that has drawn national attention.

The lawmakers said university administrators must take stronger action after student Mary-Catherine Hallmark confronted classmates who allegedly celebrated the assassination of conservative activist Charlie Kirk.

Both said the university's response to the confrontation fell short and called for changes in how such cases are handled.

"To be honest, we expect a lot more of UNT," Hopper said to the crowd. "We live in a university town that has become increasingly liberal and UNT is not just a reflective nature of that culture; it is a driving force of that culture, and it has been for a very long time."

Hopper said the university must enforce its student conduct code and ensure students understand "you cannot be in a classroom and proclaim support" for acts such as Kirk's killing.

"If there are savages, if there are people who are basically relishing in the death of Americans, that is severely anti-social behavior, and we should not have students that are basically living off of our tax money going to a public university that are cheering the gruesome death of fellow Americans in class," Hopper said to the crowd.

State rep. Andy Hopper honors university student Mary-Catherine Hallmark at Denton's Downtown Square on Sept. 23, 2025. **Photo by Katie Brackens**

He said that the university's reliance on state funding leaves it especially accountable to lawmakers who he claims are watching the university and expecting "decisive behavior soon."

"UNT is not in the same physical position that UT is," Hopper said. "They don't have a large endowment. They are dependent upon the state of Texas completely for their funding."

The university is funded through four main streamszz: state appropriations, tuition and fees, research grants and contracts and services such as housing and dining, according to the university's budget office.

Of the $1,007,575,199 budget for the 2025 fiscal year, 20.1 percent was derived from state appropriations and 3.8 percent from capital appropriations.

State appropriations are money a state's legislature authorizes for public agencies for one-time or day-to-day expenses. Capital is money set aside by the state for long-term projects and investments.

Hallmark, who said she has not returned to the class since Sept. 10, said she has not received any updates from the university despite filing reports.

"It was scary, because it was just one voice against many," Hallmark said. "But I prayed about it, and I knew this was the right thing to do, so that's why I took action."

Hopper said the university should apologize to Hallmark directly and ensure she feels safe on campus.

On Sept. 19, Hopper, along with Reps. Mitch Little, Ben Bumgarner and Richard Hayes, signed a letter addressed to Gov. Greg Abbott, urging him to investigate what they described as a "concerning lack of response," from the university.

Hopper said he has not yet received a reply from the governor's office but had spoken with one of Abbott's senior officials.

"She saw people in her class celebrating the gruesome assassination of an absolute patriot, a fellow American, and rather than allow them to continue, she decided, 'I'm going to use my voice and stand up,'" Hopper said. "That has created a whirlwind for her, but there are so many patriots supporting her across North Texas."

Luther said despite not knowing the "specifics," she believes the university should stay in direct contact with Hallmark and ensure her safety after speaking out.

About three dozen people gathered to honor Hallmark. The event opened with a prayer, followed by speeches that praised the student's actions.

Luther compared Hallmark's decision to her own choice to defy COVID-19 shutdown orders in 2020, when she was briefly jailed.

"You can learn the law, you can learn what you are allowed to do, but it is very difficult to learn courage," Luther said at the ceremony to Hallmark. "You are born with that. God puts you in tough situations so you can shine light in the darkness. And that is exactly what you did."

Hopper read aloud a resolution commending Hallmark for "publicly condemning the celebration of an act of political violence" and gave her a Texas flag that had flown over the Texas State Capitol.

Hopper said that he expects the university to act soon and said at the very least the university should thank Hallmark "for standing up for civilized behavior."

"I believe the University of North Texas will pull through on all this," Hopper said. "I think that they have a great opportunity to make a difference, to change the culture at UNT and that's what we're looking for."

Hallmark briefly addressed the crowd, thanking attendees for their encouragement.

"As much hate as I'm getting, I'm getting more support," she said. "Students are coming up to me saying, 'You are giving me a voice on campus,' and that makes me want to push harder and not give up."

The *North Texas Daily* attempted to speak to Hallmark's mother, Randee Hallmark, who told the *Daily* to speak with university President Harrison Keller.

Editor's note: News Editor Shehzil Imran also contributed to this reporting.

NEWS AROUND TEXAS

By Shehzil Imran
News Editor

Liquor stores to crack down on selling THC to those under 21

On Sept. 23, the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission approved an emergency rule in an effort to comply with an executive order signed by Gov. Greg Abbott. The emergency rule, which goes into effect Oct. 1, will require liquor store retailers to verify that a customer wanting THC is at least 21 years old. Failure to comply with the rule will cause TABC license holders to have their license revoked. The rule specifically applies to the 60,000 TABC license holders, excluding smoke shops, gas stations and online retailers that do not hold a TABC license. The executive order that the rule accommodates bans the sale of THC products to minors.

Gov. Greg Abbott signs 'bathroom bill'

On Sept. 22, Gov. Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 8, also known as the "bathroom bill." The new bill, which will go into effect Dec. 4, states that people will be legally required to use public restrooms and locker rooms that align with the sex listed on the individual's birth certificate. If someone violates the law, the institution will be subject to a $25,000 fine for the first offense, and $125,000 for each following incident. The bill makes an exception for law enforcement, first responders, custodians and those accompanying children under 10-years-old into a public restroom.

First OpenAI data center to open in Texas

Artificial intelligence company OpenAI announced on Sept. 23 that it will open five new AI data centers, including the first Texas site in Abilene. The centers are a part of an agreement with the Stargate Project, a company that aims to invest $500 billion over the next four years to create and expand AI structures for OpenAI. The Abilene location is to hold over 5.5 gigawatts of data capacity, while also creating at least 25,000 on-site jobs. The goal of the project, according to OpenAI's website, is to create new jobs and benefit the economy, while also improving national security and supporting "re-industrialization."

Camp Mystic to partially reopen in 2026 after July 4 flooding

The family-owned Christian girls camp, Camp Mystic, will reopen its Cypress Lake location in 2026, while its Guadalupe River site remains closed. The camp sites closed after intense flooding on July 4 resulted in the death of two counselors and 25 campers. Camp Mystic officials said they will be rebuilding cabins and trails, ensuring future campers do not have to stay in the previously flooded cabins. Additionally, officials said there are plans to build a memorial for the deceased, known as the "Heaven's 27."

Denton Blues Fest returns with 'food and music' to Quakertown Park to over 100 attendees

BLUES continued from page 1

Performances took place approximately every hour, with the band Noni Rae and the Cheddar Boyz Blues starting the event at noon on Saturday and the headliner Ghost Ghoston concluding around 10:30 p.m. The last two Sunday night groups, Fingertips and headliner Mathias Lattin, were unable to perform because a storm forced the organizers to end the event early.

Davis sang a cover of "Sweet Little Angel" (1957) by blues musician B.B. King and a variety of other songs.

Davis began singing in his church choir at the age of three, and he said that music helped him navigate the struggles of his early life. He said he taught himself to sing, drawing inspiration from famous blues performers such as Al Green and Mahalia Jackson.

"I've been living the blues longer than I've been singing the blues," Davis said. "I have just this love for what artists like B.B. King and Buddy Guy did for blues entertainment. I live it, I have lived it and I love it."

Besides hosting musical performances, the Blues Festival also had over a dozen local vendors selling items like food, art and clothing. The aroma of food trucks, cotton candy and baked goods swirled around the park, drawing people in.

Charlotte Watson-Allen, an assistant principal for Terrel ISD and the co-owner of TC's Pieces of Love Gourmet Pecans, has been a vendor at the Denton Blues Festival for the past two years. Watson-Allen and her husband sold gourmet pecans in six different flavors, like bourbon and Texas peach whiskey.

Guitarist Izaiah Forman and bassist Nico V Manescu perform together during the Denton Blues Festival at Quakertown Park on Sept. 20, 2025. **Photo by Trennt Rhea**

Watson-Allen said the festival is extremely beneficial to her business.

"Last year, we sold out Saturday night," Watson-Allen said. "We had to leave early because we sold out, so we went home, stayed up until 2 o'clock making everything, came back and sold out a second day. This year, we came prepared."

Watson-Allen is also the president of Unity in the Community of Ennis, a nonprofit organization that participates in similar events, such as the Denton Blues Festival. She said she loves connecting with people through both her nonprofit and pecan business.

Watson-Allen called the Denton Blues Festival a historic event that she hopes to be a part of in the years to come.

"My philosophy is, two things bring people together: food and music," Watson-Allen said. "So, even though blues is kind of derived from the Black culture, it incorporates everybody. I think that's what I am passionate about and what I love, [which] is that it's something that moves beyond gender, race, ethnicity, all of it."

Things To Do:

TWU Wedding Showcase 2025

When: Sunday, Sept. 28, 1 p.m.
Where: TWU Little Chapel in-the-Woods, 304 Administration Drive
What: A free, come-and-go event, Texas Womans University says the event "is the perfect opportunity to explore all that TWU has to offer for your big day." Referencing a wedding, guests will have the chance to tour the campus's ceremony and reception locations, including the Little Chapel in-the-Woods, University Gardens, and the Student Union at Hubbard Hall.

PolaCon 10

When: Sept. 26- 28.
Where: Rubber Gloves, 411 E. Sycamore St.
What: PolaCon itself is a three-day event featuring more than 25 instant photography-centered events, including photo walks at the State Fair of Texas and around Denton, camera demonstrations, workshops and a "ZineFest" featuring local art and photography vendors. PolaCon, the world's first instant film convention, has evolved to host conventions in New York City and California's Bay Area every year in addition to Denton.

Blocktober Party & Pumpkin Drop

When: Wednesday, Oct. 1 at 6 p.m.
Where: Denton Civic Center, 321 E. McKinney St.
What: To celebrate the first night of Halloween, attendees are invited to watch pumpkins filled with various foods soar and splatter from dizzying heights. The event has free attendance and City staff will be present.

University Comedy Club undertakes unscripted adventures with long-form improv premiere

By Caitlyn Ybarra
Staff Writer

Moments before the university Comedy Club performed their first long-form improvisations of the year, the club's president and university senior, Jacqueline O'Neill, recounted her personal experience of a recent party fail.

Instantly, she created an atmosphere where performers could poke fun at themselves, each other and even the audience. The story quickly filled Union room 332 with laughter and smiles, the first of many outbursts of the night.

"Long form tells longer stories, and so it takes more time, but the added benefit is you'll get more in-depth characters and more interesting stories out of it," O'Neill said. "The cons to long form is that audience engagement is harder to retain, but the cons of short form are that the stories aren't as strong or powerful as they could be."

The stage then opened for long form, a type of improvisation that relies more heavily on acting skills and longer beats. Performers went off on an audience suggestion of an "evil bookstore" as the scene's location.

With stories revolving around audience suggestions, anyone attending one of the club's free shows, which take place every Monday at 8 p.m., could play a role in shaping how the unscripted performance unfolded.

As an English major, O'Neill compared a good improvisation to the same aspect that creates a successful story.

"If you tell a good beginning, middle, and end, the audience is just going to like it more," O'Neill said. "They're going to be more connected with it, they're going to feel closer to it, and they're going to feel like they got a stronger show out of it. That's the key to success in every narrative."

O'Neill also said the more the audience is engaged, the bigger a fan favorite the improv game they are playing will become.

"There's a game we do called 'Sibling Rivalry' where two improvisers quite literally have an argument just like they're siblings," O'Neill said. "They walk in between [the audience] and they'll point at audience members for suggestions for words they'll use in their argument."

Sophomore advertising student Jonas Fleming, a short troupe member, enjoys the audience engagement aspect.

"It forces us to really adapt to whatever the scene could be," Fleming said. "I like getting audience participation because I really like the creativity of some people's designs, like it could be an upside-down mansion or something else fun."

Thanks to the spontaneous nature of improv, audience suggestions are often just a stepping stone for where the actors will take the scene. Before long, the audience's "evil bookstore" suggestion spiraled into a murder mystery story where characters replayed their alibis via magical books that transported them to a scene before the crime.

With so much to remember within one story, junior mechanical engineering student Dax Laber, a long troupe member, said the key was repetition of details.

"If I'm in a scene with another person and they have a name and role in that scene, I'm always running it through my head," Laber said. "'This is Jeremy and he's a butcher', or 'This is Mike and he's a grave digger,' like so on and so forth."

For Fleming, not overthinking and going with the flow helped him to keep up with the ever-evolving storyline and character complexions.

"It does get confusing sometimes," Fleming said. "But since you're constantly blanking the whole time, you kind of just figure it out and you feel it out, and then it ends up making sense somehow."

Short form troupe member Amber Gantt plays an older brother during one of the skits at the Comedy's Got Talent rehearsal on Sept. 18, 2025. **Photo by Marcella Lunardini**

For audience members seeking fast bursts of content, the club also performed short-form improv games that skipped the complex nature created by long-form stories.

"[With short form], you can get more immediate laughs, right away," Fleming said. "As soon as you start the scene, you can be explosive and not worry about running out of breath, you just go, go, go [...] there were so many scenes happening and so many funny ideas like 'Where does the slime come from?' and that's stuck in my head now."

The audience's cooperation with both long and short-form improv made for a bubbly evening that unlocked the inner comedian in many who attended.

"What a lot of people don't realize is that everybody is inherently funny," O'Neill said. "We all laugh at each other all the time."

Denton community gathers at Bearded Monk for pillow fight to raise funds for Arts and Jazz festival

By Rebecca Hsu
Staff Writer

With water cups in hand, feathers paint the ground as the pillows attendees are using to bash each other rip open, doing everything in their power to avoid spilling their cups and losing their round.

Organized as a fundraiser for the Denton Arts and Jazz Festival, the pillow fight event invited community members to donate $5 and "enjoy the game." Krissi Oden, the final champion of the pillow fight and executive director of the Greater Denton Arts Council, said the event was energetic and reflected the spirit of Denton.

"I think it reflects what Denton is," Oden said. "And we always are down for a good time. We're down to support a good cause, and we're just down to empower each other."

Ben Esely, owner of The Bearded Monk and a university alumnus, said the bar first started hosting the pillow fight fundraising event in 2017 and has been hosting pillow fight fundraisers about once a year for different local organizations.

Esely said he chose to fundraise for the Arts and Jazz Festival this year after seeing the event face funding cuts and began seeking support from local organizations and business owners.

Associate planner Sean Jacobson (right) participates in the Pillow Fights for Art and Jazz fundraiser at The Bearded Monk on Sept. 20, 2025. **Photo by Katie Brackens**

According to a KERA News article, the Denton Festival Foundation, which runs the Denton Arts and Jazz Festival, started to fundraise with a $75,000 goal in July after learning that it would be charged a rental fee for the whole park which is the festivals venue and would lose some of the city's in-kind spending, which is a type of funding for providing services like police, EMS and fire personnel.

"Arts and Jazz is such a big thing," Esely said. "It's been around forever and ever. But this year, man, funding is cut. It's hard to find financial support to put on such a great event like this [...]. We got to find that money and make sure that Arts and Jazz is just the best it can be."

The pillow fight took place in the Beer Alley outside The Bearded Monk. Two players competed against each other in each round. The rule is to protect the water in one's own cup while trying to spill their competitor's water.

"It's more difficult than it looks," Esely said. "You saw us dancing around out there. It's really tough to hit a tiny cup while protecting your own cup."

The event invited some special guests to kick off the first few rounds, and Oden was one of them. Oden said it felt weird to stand on the field and try to hit someone with a pillow, but she was having a lot of fun.

"It's really fun, because these are all my friends," Oden said. "Like, I know everybody that I just had a pillow fight with, so it's funny. It's fun. It is kind of different to see one of them coming at you, trying to knock something out of your hand, but it's all in fun, and it was amazing."

A contestant, Sean Jacobson, also a board member of the Denton Evening Rotary Club and a university alumnus, described the event as "people that love each other trying to pummel the crap out of each other with pillows."

As a big fan of the Arts and Jazz Festival, Jacobson said participating in the fundraising event was a huge thing for him.

"Fundraising things to make Denton better is something that's very near and dear to my heart," Jacobson said. "I love it."

This year's Denton Arts and Jazz Festival will take place on October 3-5 at Denton's Quakertown Park. The event is free and open to the community.

Jen Peace, the vice president of the Denton Festival Foundation, who helped facilitate the pillow fight, said the festival will use only half of the park this year to save money, but will still feature the same programs.

"We're not missing any stages," Peace said. "We're going to have all the stages we've had in the past. It's just going to be a little bit more compact."

Peace said the money raised at the pillow fight event will go 100 percent to festival support. She added that online donations and other businesses hosting fundraisers also help bring the foundation closer to its fundraising goal.

Peace said seeing the community come together to support the festival warms her heart.

"Denton is really a community that supports its festivals and the arts," Peace said. "It's a festival that was built by the community. People who loved art and people who loved jazz created [it] [...] We've been going strong for 35 years, so here's to 35 more."

A recession indicator, Frost Children craft a nearly perfect pop album

By Thomas Trevino
Staff Writer

If anyone still doubts the return of recession pop, an upbeat escapist style of pop party anthems popularized during the 2008 Great Recession, Frost Children's "SISTER" is here to settle the score.

The New York-based sibling duo, Angel and Lulu Prost, have established a reputation for bending hyperpop into nostalgic shapes. On their sixth album, "SISTER," they lean all the way into the shameless and flashy energy of early-2010s electronic dance music.

For years, the early 2010s felt like the era that would never make a comeback. Slowly but surely, however, the same sounds that were blaring from mall speakers, frat basements and 10-second YouTube video introductions are being revitalized, catering to a whole new audience.

After two minutes of building tension, the album's opener, "Position Famous, erupts into a vivid representation of shutter shades and swag-era perfection. The contrast between the buildup and the burst of neon synths sets the tone for "SISTER," showing the sibling duo is tuning back into the golden age of EDM.

The second track, "Falling," unfolds like a scene from "Spring Breakers" (2012) with sleazy vocals dripping over blinding bright production. This song channels string bikinis, glow-stick jewelry and burns like a UV index of 11. It is truly unforgettable.

Illustration by Thomas Trevino

"ELECTRIC" is a song that lives up to its name. Pulsing with The Dare energy, this song keeps its lyrics in caps lock and the production blaring. The track is brash, careless and euphoric all at once, making it the perfect song to burn the floor down with.

Continuing the chaotic energy from the previous track, "CONTROL" is a sonic wrecking ball that blows out speakers, bursts eardrums and shatters glass. It is a true standout, perfectly representing everything the club tried to be.

"Bound2U" opens soft yet sensual in nature before diving face-first into a dense, chaotic beat drop. Admittedly, at this point in the album, the drops begin to feel a bit repetitive, IS FOREVER FOR," is pure late-night chaos. This song perfectly combines fellow hyperpop artist Jane Remover's intoxicating production with Snow Strippers' pure rager energy, another artist in the scene with more dance-focused energy, creating a song that is ideal for losing oneself in.

The title track "Sister" feels like the perfect centerpiece to the album. It serves as a heartfelt tribute to Angel and Lulu Prost's bond, culminating in the album's most intimate moment.

"Dirty girl" is the album's scrappiest track yet, leaning far more punk than the album has done so far. This song is feral and unhinged, building itself up from the kind of bashment-mosh energy that is dripping in sweat and leaves glitter all over the floor.

In a stark, yet simultaneously cohesive contrast, "RADIO (feat. Kim Petras)" is a track of pure raw-edged pop and one of the album's most striking songs.

"Don't make me cry" is a profoundly vulnerable and honest track disguised by glitter and motion. It starts off sounding like a slow-motion club montage but bursts into radio-perfect pop perfection.

"Ralph Lauren (feat. Babymorocco)" is the exact opposite of the track before. Shrugged-off images of glamorous girls in up-dos and smudged eyeliner collide with cut-up vocals and an unrelenting beat, taking it all the way back to the beauty of swag-era sleaze.

"Blue Eyes" feels like a combination of every previous track, and while it is well-executed, it is not particularly memorable.

"4ME" is cool, slow and just what the album needed to feel like a true ode to all the genres and cultures its sound was crafted from.

The album closes with "2LØVE," a strong track in its own right, but one that feels misplaced. Despite that, the song remains a grand goodbye, as it brings the listener back to the high energy and neon vibes of before.

Frost Children do not just flirt with nostalgia on "SISTER," they weaponize it, channeling the flashy chaos of early-2010s EDM into a sound that feels both familiar and fresh. Even when the record stumbles, its sheer audacity is impossible to ignore. It is a chaotic, glitter-soaked time capsule cracked open and reassembled for 2025.

Thomas' rating: 4.5/5

Icon of the Week:

Jimmy Kimmel

Credit **Erin Scott**

The *North Texas Daily*'s Icon of the week is James Christian Kimmel.

Known best as the host and Executive Producer of "Jimmy Kimmel Live!." Kimmel was suspended last Wednesday, Sept. 17, for comments made by him about Charlie Kirk's Assassination.

Brenden Carr, the Federal Communications Commission chairman, said in a podcast the following day to Benny Johnson that he would seek regulatory action against Disney.

Hours later, "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" was suspended.

Kimmel was born in Brooklyn, New York City on Nov. 17, 1967 and grew up as an altar boy.

Later, inspired by David Letterman, he got his start in comedy on his high school's radio program, where he hosted a weekly hour-long show.

He continued working for radio stations into college where he hosted a Sunday night interview show for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, a school he attended until getting picked up to be a gameshow host for Comedy Central, a role he would win an Emmy for in the late 90s.

In 2003, his own show on ABC was aired for the first time. Since, he has spent 23 seasons on late night.

Lola Young thrives in chaos on 'I'm Only F**king Myself'

By Ismael Beltran
Photo Editor

A year after her viral breakout "Messy" stormed TikTok, British singer-songwriter Lola Young returns with "I'm Only F**king Myself," a 14-track, 46-minute album that turns heartbreak and addiction into a statement of identity.

Released on Sept. 19, Young blends alt-pop, soul and grungy R&B into something jagged but purposeful, embracing chaos head-on while keeping the biting wit and raspy energy that made her stand out in the first place.

The record opens unconventionally with "how long will it take to walk a mile? (interlude)." Instead of a traditional track, Young offers listeners a voice recording of a friend expressing her appreciation. It sets a wholesome tone, framing the album as personal and conversational.

That intimacy does not last long. Track two, "F**K EVERYONE," flips the mood instantly. Over a rebel-synth beat, Young explores sexuality with unfiltered straightforwardness.

Illustration by Victoria Maldonado

"I just wanna f- guys who don't like me and don't mind / I just wanna f- girls who don't love me, they don't mind." It is raw and cheeky, serving as the impulse that propels the rest of the album forward.

Track four, "d£aler," one of the singles pre-released on July 25, builds on the album's personal theme. The song builds on a slow shuffle and a deep bass line, with Young feeling nervous about confessing her love, wanting to pack up and leave.

"I wanna get away, far from here, pack my bags, my drugs, and disappear." During the track, she admits she will miss her drug dealer, giving sense to the title of the track, "Yeah, tell my dealer I'll miss him." The Britpop elements woven throughout highlight her London roots, giving the song a distinctive vibe.

Track five, "SPIDERS," stays true to its eerie title. The track starts slowly, then builds into an explosive chorus that crawls up on you, where Young's raspy vocals scream through the mix. Paired with a black-and-white music video featuring a spider crawling on her as she lip-syncs, the song doubles down on discomfort, showcasing her willingness to lean into dark imagery.

The middle of the record finds Young exploring softer tones. Track eight, "Post Sex Clarity," is a standout, combining confessional songwriting with a crashing outro.

"When I'm lying in bed, got post sex clarity, I still love you, and I don't know why," she sings in the chorus, shifting away from the feminist tone of earlier songs toward reluctant vulnerability in the opposite sex, as she wonders if this time is different.

Track 10, "CAN WE IGNORE IT? :(," channels Amy Winehouse with its grungy energy. The lyrics wrestle back and forth with cycles of addiction and avoidance. "And if you love me like you say, you'll let me escape." The track demonstrates Young's self-awareness of her influences and reworks them into something uniquely hers.

Track 11, "why do i feel better when I hurt you?" brings the vibe down, as Young softly repeats the chorus over and over again to a slower melodic pop beat. While not groundbreaking or noteworthy, it connects tracks 11 and 12.

By track 12, "Not Like That Anymore," Young introduces a brighter, springy energy, even as the subject matter remains heavy. "But if I look on the bright side, at least I'm not f-ing myself anymore, not anymore," she belts over chaotic drumming. It is a track that pushes back against her own self-destruction without losing her edge.

The emotional peak comes with track 13, "who f**king cares?" Stripped down to guitar and vocals, Young reflects on her addictions and self-doubt. "And am I happy? Truth is, I don't really know what that means anymore." The song's simplicity makes it one of Young's most vulnerable on the record, pulling together the album's central themes even still.

The closer, "ur an absolute c word (interlude)," mirrors the opener. The same friend steps in with a slam-poetry style piece, ending with Young shouting, "F- that was incredible, you come up with that?" The choice brings the album full circle, tying the conversational and personal theme together in an emotionally raw and wholesome close.

While not every track hits with equal force, "I'm Only F**king Myself" succeeds by showcasing Young's ability to embrace imperfection. It captures the contradictions of being messy, self-aware and unafraid to embrace herself. The album is rougher than polished, but that feels like the point.

For longtime listeners, this record demonstrates Young's refusal to be labeled as a one-hit wonder. She is chaotic, bold and unpredictable, but her talent and honesty cut through the noise. For new fans, it is a clear introduction to the sound and personality that make her one of the U.K.'s most compelling young artists.

"I'm Only F**king Myself" proves she is building something real. The album thrives on its authenticity, turning personal battles into raw, musical art.

Ismael's rating: 4.5/5

North Texas swim and dive prepare for new season without several graduated seniors

SWIM continued from page 1

"We mentally prepared ourselves knowing that this is the team for next year and we want to fill in those shoes," senior swimmer and team captain Isa Ruiz said. "[We] even [want to] do a little bit better than we usually do and hit those high expectations they left us."

To replace the lost talent, six new swimmers joined the program during the offseason. Among the new additions were freshman swimmer Maria Jose Sanchez Castro who made it to multiple national competition finals while competing in Mexico.

While Sophomore swimmer Maria Mitova earned multiple podium finishes over the summer at the Bulgarian Championships.

"I think the new team that Brittany [Roth] and Justin [Hastings] brought in, those new girls are full of energy," Guidara said. "From what I've seen from them and heard about them, this team is headed in an insane direction."

To start the upcoming season, the swimming team will head to Edmond, Oklahoma, on Sept. 27 for the Sam Freas Invite. The invitation is an exhibition to help prepare both the Mean Green and the host team, Oklahoma Christian University, with actual competition after the offseason.

"It gives our athletes a chance to race other teams," Roth said. "Something else happens when there's a person from another team next to you, you kind of go to another level of competition."

Both the swim and dive teams will participate in the SMU Invite on Oct. 3. It will be the first event for the dive team since they finished last year at the NCAA Zone D Diving Championship. Senior Kamryn Wong became the first-ever North Texas diver to reach the finals at the event in last season's diving championship.

Last year, Wong, sophomore diver Amelia Sharp and Guidara finished the year with a gold medal in the team diving event at the American Women's Swimming and Diving Championship. Individually, they battled each other all year for multiple program records, including the 3-meter and 1-meter springboard.

Then junior swimmer Iza Ruiz participates in the 200 breaststroke during the American Women's Swimming and Diving Championship in Dallas, Texas on Feb. 22, 2025. **Photo by Tyler Quisenberry**

Wong, Sharp and Guidara are among the many recruits and transfers who have arrived at Denton under associate head coach/diving coach Stephanie O'Callaghan, who joined the program in 2021. Since her arrival, the diving team has reached program highs with what Guidara describes as a constantly changing.

"I think we're always evolving," Guidara said. "We're never doing the same thing every year. Last year, we changed a lot of things, and clearly it paid off."

After the conference championships, it was announced that O'Callaghan had won the American Conference Diving Coach of the Year award. Wong joined her in winning conference honors and won the American's Most Outstanding Diver award.

This will likely be the final season for six of the athletes, including Ruiz and Wong. Ruiz said her goal this season is to set the program up for success, not just this final year for them, but for years to come.

"Not only do I want to make sure that my team feels like they are mentally and physically prepared as their captain, but I also want to leave my mark," Ruiz said.

Athlete of the Week:

Caleb Hawkins

Credit **Mean Green Sports**

With an increased role against Army on Sept. 20, freshman running back Caleb Hawkins scored four rushing touchdowns alongside 99 rushing yards on 13 carries. His performance tied the program record and prior to Hawkins, the last time a North Texas player scored four touchdowns was 2011 when former NFL running back Lance Dunbar accomplished the same milestone on Dec. 3, 2011. Prior to the game against the Black Knights, Hawkins saw most of his playing time late in blowout wins for the Mean Green with 18 yards against Lamar and 50 against Washington State. With sophomore running back Kiefer Sibley out for the game, Hawkins received a season-high 13 carries that matched the total carries he had in his two previous appearances combined.

At a Glance:

Football

North Texas football (4-0, 1-0 American Conference) continued its undefeated start with a 45-38 win against Army on Sept. 20 and now will be challenged by a visiting South Alabama (1-3, 0-1 Sun Belt Conference) team on Sept. 27 at 11 a.m. The matchup between the two teams will be the Mean Green's final non-conference game before officially beginning its conference schedule. The Jaguars are coming off a 38-20 loss to Coastal Carolina (2-2, 1-0 Sun Belt Conference).

Volleyball

The Mean Green volleyball team (10-2) are on a seven-game win streak heading into American Conference play after another undefeated run at their last three-game tournament in the Texan Classic. With 10 wins on the year in just its non-conference schedule, North Texas has already matched the number of total wins last year's team recorded in its 10-18 season. The Mean Green's first American opponent is the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (9-3) on Sept. 26 at 7 p.m.

Soccer

North Texas soccer (4-6-1, 0-1-0 American Conference) returns home to Denton for its first home American matchup against Charlotte (4-4-0, 0-1-0 American Conference) on Sept. 25 at 8 p.m. Then the Mean Green will stay home for another American game against the University of East Carolina (3-4-2, 1-1-0 American Conference) on Sept. 28 at 2 p.m. North Texas has begun the season winless in its first American game with a 0-1 loss to the University of Texas at San Antonio (6-2-2, 2-0 American Conference).

COLUMN: North Texas football head coach Eric Morris could be next in line for a Power Four job

By Ian Pfaffenberger
Staff Writer

It is no secret to North Texas fans that football head coach Eric Morris is a offensive mastermind.

In each of his first two seasons with the Mean Green, Morris' offense has ranked in the top six nationally in total offense, in the top 12 in passing and in the top 23 in scoring. This season, the team has gotten off to a 4-0 start, its best since 2018, with the offense currently ranked ninth in scoring and 20th in red zone offense.

So, the question begs to be asked – why is Morris not a head coach at the Power Four level?

The offensive success is not recent for Morris either, but rather a trend that has been ongoing for more than a decade of coaching. Before North Texas, Morris held a myriad of positions across Division I schools, including being an offensive coordinator at Texas Tech and Washington State, and head coach at the University of the Incarnate Word.

Since 2013, Morris has led an offense that finished in the top 25 of the Football Bowl Subdivision or Football Championship Subdivision in scoring nine out of 12 years. He has also led offenses that finished top 10 in total offense nine times.

Throughout those positions, he recruited several future NFL quarterbacks like Patrick Mahomes, Baker Mayfield and even Cam Ward, who was a zero-star prospect. His most recent quarterback project, redshirt freshman Drew Mestemaker, has burst into the scene this year, leading the American and tying for fifth nationally in passing touchdowns through week four.

Morris has one of the best eyes in the nation for quarterback talent and the skill to develop them. However, he remains at the Group of Six level. One potential reason has been the lack of defensive success in his time at North Texas.

During his first two years at North Texas, Morris' defense greatly struggled. In 2023 and 2024, the defense ranked 133rd and 125th in yards allowed per game and 131st and 118th in points allowed per game, respectively. Even with Morris' offense putting up substantial numbers, his teams still finished with records of 5-7 and 6-7 over the past two seasons.

The lack of in-season success, coupled with back-to-back finishes at the bottom of the conference, has led to Morris being overlooked despite his impressive offensive numbers.

This season, however, North Texas has flipped the script. The key to the team's defensive success so far has been the arrival of new defensive coordinator Skyler Cassity and several transfers who followed him to Denton.

Whereas previously the Mean Green relied on Morris' quick-paced, air raid offensive game plan to keep them competitive in high-scoring games, the team has played effective complementary football to start the season.

Through the first three weeks of the season, the team ranked 11th in the country in scoring offense and 29th in scoring defense, the only non-Power Four team in the nation to rank inside the top 30 in both categories.

As for the defense, they rank 37th in yards allowed per game and 11th in passing yards per game. They have improved their yards allowed from last year by 164.2 yards, the fourth-best year-to-year improvement in the FBS.

With the team off to a 4-0 start and with two 40-plus point wins on their resume, Morris and the team have started to put themselves in contention for an American title. In the college football world, success often leads to advancement.

With Power Four programs like UCLA, Virginia Tech and Oklahoma State dismissing their head coaches early this season, the coaching carousel looks to be off to a wild ride.

Amongst the swirl of names in line for elevation, Morris was mentioned in Sports Illustrated's 2025 College Football Coaching Carousel as a name to keep an eye on. Following Mike Gundy's firing at OSU, Morris' name was immediately mentioned by CBS as a candidate for the job.

The modern college football world is one where talent constantly gets elevated to the top. It has been a slow burn for Morris in terms of his journey to the apex, but if it were to happen, it would be much deserved and expected.

Head football coach Eric Morris looks at the drills during the first day of spring camp at the Lovelace & McNatt Families Practice Facility on March 18, 2025. **Photo by Ismael Beltran**

Celebrating Hispanic heritage should also include resisting ongoing issues in Latino communities

By Juan Carlos Ramirez
Staff Writer

Illustration by Mekielle Vaughn

Every year in the middle of September, flags wave high and parades march on during Hispanic Heritage Month, displaying the beauty of Hispanic cultures and the pride that comes with being Latino. However, this year's celebrations feel different because of attacks on Hispanic communities by the current presidential administration.

From the increase in Immigration and Customs Enforcement raids to the recent Supreme Court ruling clearing the way for racial profiling, fear is overcoming joy in celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month. While this month is meant to honor the culture, art, food, music and history of Hispanic and Latino communities, this year has met these communities with pressing challenges that cannot be ignored.

Across the country, celebrations such as the Chicago Mexican Independence festival have been postponed due to President Donald Trump's promises of immigration crackdowns in the city. Trump also attempted to send the National Guard to Chicago earlier in September to deal with the city's alleged unrest, but pivoted to send them to Memphis instead amid resistance from city officials.

Organizers of the El Grito celebration in Chicago, an iconic Mexican civic celebration, cited the cancellation on their website as being due to concerns about putting the community's safety at risk.

The reasonable fear that ICE agents will target such gatherings for deportation arrests has cast a shadow over spaces that are meant to be unifying. Instead of gathering to celebrate cultural pride, many families are forced to weigh the risk of visibility against the possibility of detention, regardless of legal status, as the Supreme Court has greenlighted racial profiling during immigration raids.

In a 6-3 vote on Sept. 8, for the case known as Noem v. Vasquez Perdomo, the Supreme Court granted an emergency request from the Trump administration. It temporarily stopped a Los Angeles judge's order that barred roving patrols. These patrols would take people off California streets and question them based on their appearance, language spoken and what work they do.

Both a Los Angeles federal court and the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals had ruled that these actions amounted to illegal racial profiling.

In his explanation for the decision, Associate Justice Brett Kavanaugh writes that if ICE agents have used excessive force, "the Fourth Amendment prohibits such action, and remedies should be available in federal court."

However, previous court rulings, such as Egbert v. Boule, make it almost impossible to obtain any sort of remedy in a federal court when a federal officer violates the law.

This is not the final law but a temporary decision, the ruling sends a powerful message: the protections under the Fourth Amendment against unreasonable searches and seizures do not apply equally if a person looks Latino or speaks Spanish.

"We should not have to live in a country where the Government can seize anyone who looks Latino, speaks Spanish, and appears to work a low-wage job," Justice Sonia Sotomayor wrote in her dissenting opinion. "Rather than stand idly by while our constitutional freedoms are lost, I dissent."

The increase in power that immigration agencies are receiving nationwide is also evident locally, as Denton leaders met with ICE a few weeks ago as part of Trump's January executive order requiring ICE to meet with local and state law enforcement.

That order, paired with the lack of a proclamation for Hispanic Heritage Month, makes it clear that both his actions and inactions send a message.

Unlike every president before him, Trump has not issued a proclamation recognizing Hispanic Heritage Month this year. However, earlier in the year he did make a proclamation recognizing Black History Month but it was shorter than the one made during his first term according to Forbes.

While such a statement is not necessary for communities to celebrate Hispanic culture, the silence is symbolic – it reflects the administration's broader effort to sideline Latino voices.

While this is a clear power grab by the current administration, trying to remove and silence Hispanic pride. This is not the first time it has happened, as the community has faced continuous attacks made against the Hispanic community by Trump's administration.

For generations, Latino communities have found ways to carry out their culture and resilience through discrimination and political hostility that will outlast this administration.

MSNBC columnist Julio Ricardo Varela captured this idea best: "While the Trump administration may try to drive us into the shadows, like Justice Sotomayor, we dissent." His words highlight the spirit of Hispanic communities being resilient, defiant and unwilling to be silenced.

As Hispanic Heritage Month continues, celebrations should highlight not only Hispanic culture but also their collective refusal to be pushed aside. Hispanic flags, music, food and stories remind the nation that the Hispanic community is here to stay, and that resilience and the ability to continue dissenting against political attacks on the community are part of the heritage.

Emerging political attacks should not hinder academic freedom in higher education

By Kyson Barber
Staff Writer

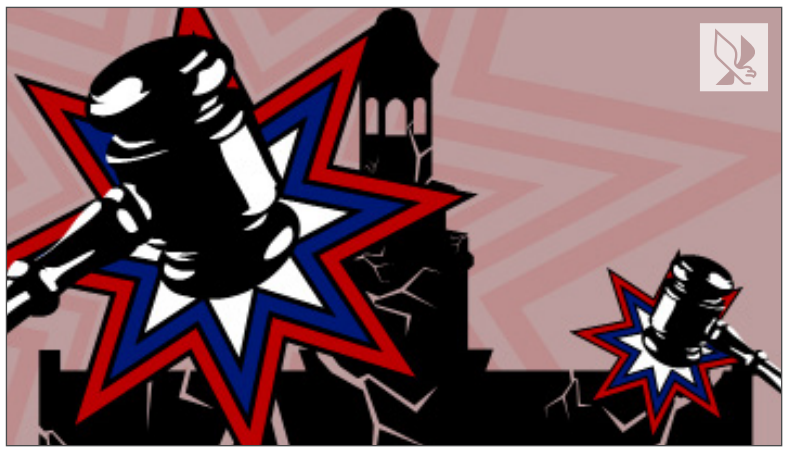


Illustration by Mekielle Vaughn

Throughout the past year, there has been a significant increase in attacks against academia. These attacks, driven by political motivations, are regressive in nature and can only harm society.

Not only are universities' curriculums being attacked, but funding threats force them to be compliant. This compliance is leading to anti-educational policies that will further harm and restrict academia.

Politicians at both the federal and state levels have been levying attacks on education that threaten financial action, whether through lawsuits or the stripping of educational funding. These attacks are usually over Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policies.

At the federal level, President Donald Trump's administration is at "war against higher education," according to NPR.

Trump has been on a crusade against Harvard University over its DEI policies. Harvard is one of the few universities that did not immediately comply with the Trump administration's policies, and Trump's intimidation of Harvard to comply resulted in the suspension and cancellation of $2.2 billion in grants, as well as legal action.

These actions against universities have not been limited to Harvard. They have also stripped other institutions, such as Columbia University and Northwestern University. Most of the funds stripped from these universities have been from research, which has fueled America as an intellectual capital of the world.

Other national attacks on universities also come in the form of legislation, such as Trump's signing of the One Big Beautiful Bill in July 2025. This bill comes after universities by limiting accessibility and cutting funding for "woke" ideology. A list of words deemed by the Trump administration to be associated with DEI is also banned when funding is considered, further impacting research that is severely underfunded, such as women's health studies.

This is not the first time these policies and actions have occurred at an international level, either. In Italy during the early 1900s, the government's control over education led to heavy emphasis on nationalism and militarism in textbooks. During the Nazi regime in Germany, Adolf Hitler appointed government officials to universities to determine which programs received funding and which were cut.

Attacks on academic freedom and government control over universities have a deep history in the death of democracies and the rise of fascism. The similarities between the current national policy and the history of fascist attacks on education are concerning, and a change of direction needs to happen.

Even locally, the university and Texas Woman's University's curriculums are being hindered by federal policies.

Gov. Greg Abbott and other Texas legislators have been attempting to gain control of the universities through financial action and Senate bills.

Recently, Texas Senate Bill 37 was signed into law on June 20 and took effect Sept. 1. This bill establishes a committee that recommends the courses required for graduation and allows the committee to review curriculum. This review allows these committees to reject any courses that are "advancing ideological or political agendas."

Examining what has lately been considered a political agenda leaves room for subjective ideological opinions. This bill represents a significant step toward silencing academic freedom by determining what is and is not considered politically charged.

Research on the climate, social issues or even law programs can be silenced or defunded very quickly. Democrats argue this lack of academic freedom will lead to a Texas "faculty brain drain," according to the Texas Tribune.

Texas' attacks on DEI and university curricula have prompted a significant number of faculty members to begin seeking jobs outside the state.

The educational landscape of fear and academic control created by the state government has caused panic in the academic world, leaving students with a less rounded education, as professors must self-censor specific topics.

The arguments used consistently by the Trump administration to justify the oversight and anti-DEI bills are that there is a liberal bias in universities. Lawmakers, with the majority of them being Republican-leaning, believe that university professors should not have their own bias influence what they teach. These same lawmakers argue that universities, as state-funded institutions, should adhere to the state's policies, since they are funded through tax dollars.

At the federal and state levels, these arguments are levied to withhold federal funds from research programs or cut programs that contradict the current administration's platform.

DEI policies, however controversial in university practices, are not a valid reason to withhold funds from important research projects or entire programs and should not be used as a scapegoat for academic regulation. Additionally, eliminating DEI policy funding in science harms the field.

The other argument of liberal bias in universities is not valid for much of the same reasons, as universities are not places of political indoctrination, but rather ideological diversity. In today's highly polarized society, people tend to resist ideas they disagree with more than they are influenced by them. There has also been no credible link made between left-wing indoctrination and universities.

The attacks and control over higher education have historically had negative consequences for society and need to be pushed back upon now. Resisting policies that impact universities' academic freedom should be the primary goal of those in positions of power in higher education.

Students also need to become and stay informed about statewide and federal actions that affect what professors teach, to combat academic suppression.

Being informed also comes with action, and if something has been proposed that tampers with or controls an individual's education, making resistance heard is necessary.